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AUTHOR Spaulding, Irving A.
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ABSTRACT

Rural sociology needs a conceptualization of social change and its implications for the discipline. Scientifically adequate conceptualization would enable rural sociologists to understand their own and others' social roles as activities which are aspects of social change. With this understanding the rural sociologist could conceive of his practical experience not just as effort to implement policy or achieve goals but as raw evidence pertinent to generalizations about social change and significant for the discipline of general sociology as well as for his own degree of success or failure as a rural sociologist. Five related orders of social change have relevance to the performance of rural sociologists. First order changes pertain to bases for motivation viewed from a psycho-social perspective on individuals. Second, third, and fourth order changes encompass aspects of relationship between and among people in the context of a society. Fifth order changes embody changes in systems of symbols used to legitimize behavior. This conceptualization of social change is relevant for rural sociologists insofar as they use it to take perspective both on their participation in social change while contributing to the achievement of imperative functions and on change which they engender in others whom they influence. (JHZ)

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An Untitled Communique

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By
Irving A. Spaulding

University of Rhode Island

Kingston, R.I.
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An Untitled Communique*

Irving A. Spaulding

University of Rhode Island

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Response

The November '85 issue of TRS makes me aware once more of long-standing concerns about rural sociology. One can appreciate both the levity and the serious tone which pervade it and still finish reading it with the feeling of underlying concern about the strong and weak aspects of the discipline and the profession. And the tale of the blind men and the elephant (Goudy, 1985) and comments about identity (Holden, 1985), for example, embody deja vu. They suggest that the discipline and the profession have not, at this time, achieved consensus on "focus and perspective" which would encompass the whole elephant and provide a firm sense of identity for rural sociologists.

I take exception to the notion that the "state-of-the-arts" in sciences, including the social sciences, precludes overcoming either or both the "blind men complex" and an ambiguity of identity. The following comments suggest a perspective which addresses those aspects of the discipline and, I hope, reaches constructively beyond them. The thrust of the comments is on conceptualization of social change and its implications for the discipline.

Germane to the comments is the idea that societies are incessantly undergoing change; equally pertinent is the idea that sociology lacks adequate conceptualization of social change. Scientifically adequate (valid, reliable, systematic, comprehensive, interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, etc.) conceptualization would enable rural sociologists, along with other social

scientists, to understand their own social roles and those of other people as activities which are aspects of social change. With this capability available, the rural sociologist could conceive of his "practical experience" not just as effort to implement policy or achieve goals (perhaps, to influence the structuring of policy and goals) but as "raw evidence" both pertinent to generalizations about social change and significant for the discipline of general sociology as well as for his own degree of success or failure in role performance as a rural sociologist. Pertinent to this capability, the following perspective delineates five related orders of social change having relevance to the performance of rural sociologists. In this presentation, 1st order changes pertain to bases for motivation viewed from a psycho-social perspective on individuals. Second, 3rd, and 4th order changes, although relevant to individuals as bases for motivation, encompass aspects of relationship between and among people in the context of a "society." Fifth order changes, also pertinent as bases for motivation, embody changes in systems of symbols used to legitimize behavior. The presentation is, at best, a sketch -- an approximation.

1st order changes: bases for motivation

The basic six and context

First order changes are changes in the salience of given bases for motivation. Although I know of no verified generalizations about these shifts, it is possible to identify configurations of related variables which in diverse combinations contribute to structured motivation. A basic configuration of bases for motives in each human being in a society embodies six variables. Three of these -- self-control, conceptualization, and emotions -- are directly associated with anatomical coordination and biological functioning; they are an associated combination. The other three, also an associated combination, are

directly pertinent to relationships between and among people. These are mutual control among group members, position within a group (status) based on variation among individuals in a group with respect to the scope of their control within that group, and identities which reflect status and the activity(ies) by which mutual control is exercised within the group.

In practice, behavior expressive of these basic motivational variables is mediated through characteristics identifiable as "guides to action" and through characteristics identifiable as "conditions of action." Guides to action are structured in two configurations. One configuration embodies attitudes, preferences, and expectations; the second configuration embodies priorities, values, and norms. Their functional relationships to each other and to the "basic six" indicated above beggar brief description, as do their implications for intent and commitment.

Conditions of action, as well, are structured in two configurations. One configuration is A. Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of prepotent needs -- physiological needs, needs for safety, needs for love and belonging, needs for esteem from others and for self, and needs for using one's (special) abilities at a "full capacity" level of achievement during intervals of "peak performance." The second is a configuration of situational characteristics. Germane here are physical characteristics both of humans and of the settings in which they act. People's involvement with each other entails characteristics of contact and isolation, consensus and diversity, precise and ambiguous meanings, and acceptance or rejection as indicated with semantic labels and or with expressions of feeling. Their orientation to space includes concepts, calibration, and reference points along with density, distance, and elevation; time orientation includes concepts, calibration, and reference points along

with characteristics of coordination. Pertinent also are dominance-submission relationships as well as those of conflict, competition, and cooperation. And, as pertinent to exchange systems, social roles can be associated with each other with degrees of dependence and independence as well as with degrees of similarity and difference.

Within the context of these variables, 1st order changes are shifts in the salience of these bases for motivation.

The basic six, in combination with guides to action and conditions of action, through both of which behavior is mediated, are complemented by bases for motivation embodied in systems of discrete achievement.

2nd, 3rd, and 4th order changes: bases for motivation

Discrete achievements

Systems of discrete achievement which function as bases for motivation and orders of change are three in number: those pertaining to imperative functions, stages of change, and phases for each stage of change. These stand as 2nd, 3rd, and 4th order changes, respectively, and as bases for motivation.

2nd order: imperative functions

Imperative functions embody eight categories of activity in which achievement and consequences must be shared by members of a group if that group is to stand as a "fully developed society." These are:

1. Securing new members and terminating memberships;
2. Socializing members to conform and handling deviants;
3. Providing essential goods and services to members and disposing of wastes;
4. Maintaining the physical condition of members and handling their injuries, illnesses, and physical and emotional limitations;

5. Stabilizing members' positions in the society and providing for members' transitions among positions;
6. Affirming the identity of the society and of individual members;
7. Leading and managing the society;
8. Coping with uncontrolled events.

These activities and consequences stand as one type of second order change, while a second type is shift from one configuration of activity and consequence to another.

3rd order: comprehensive continuity

Comprehensive continuity in change pertains to behavior and consequences (functional acts) and to groups (operative groups). For each, there are three stages: operational, developmental, and systemic. A brief, but incomplete, description of each will be followed by comment on their sequential continuity.

Acts

For an act, operational change is human movement which resolves motivating tensions and modifies the situation in which the act occurs; developmental change for an act is modification of that act, and of factors supporting and limiting it, in ways and to degrees which establish a different action orientation, i.e. a configuration of four variables -- space, "style" of movement, time, and norms -- associated with the act; systemic change for an act includes the origin of a new act, the abandonment of an existing one, and modification of an act's association with a given function.

Groups

For a group, operational changes are various. In general, they are changes which contribute to the maintenance of positions and coordination among them. They include group members' mobility through hierarchies and continuities of associated positions; they include members' shifts from

performance of one social role to performance of another while in one position or while in a given combination of positions. In addition, they include the functioning of exchange systems, communication, transportation, and migration. Developmental change in a group, however, is modification of the prevalence and/or location of any characteristic within the group. And systemic change includes the origin of new groups, the disbanding of existing ones, modification of relationships among positions in a group, and change in the position of groups with respect to each other.

Sequence

As third order changes, these stages constitute conceptually a closed and repeated continuity of operational, developmental, and systemic changes mediated through the complexities of motivational structure and change. However, systemic changes tend to occur only when conditions ensuing from operational and developmental changes are conditions functionally inadequate or inappropriate for maintaining repetition and continuation of those operational and developmental changes; otherwise, the course of change is repeated with predictable operational and developmental changes mediated through motivational structure.

Diffusion in context

When, in a given situation, a developmental or a systemic change (in action or in a group) occurs and becomes relevant to operations in that situation, that change can be diffused, allocated, and/or distributed to other situations for which it is accepted as functionally appropriate for operational changes. Among third order changes is a "diffusion sequence" in which a given change is a precondition for the subsequent one. The sequence embodies the following: origin/generation, dissemination, exchange, use, changed effectiveness, and disposition.

The sequence reflects the comprehensive continuity of operational, developmental, and systemic changes. Each change in the sequence is associated with developmental change. There are individual distinctions, however. Origins are associated with systemic changes in acts and/or groups and establish new operations or a new context for operational changes. Generation, on the other hand, is an operational change in action reproducing factors already in existence. Dissemination embodies operational change in a group through communication, migration, and transportation. Exchange, also, is an operational change in a group. Use is operational change in action with which contributions are made to the achievement of imperative functions. Ensuing changed effectiveness is an operational change in acts and in groups which can stem from relevant operational changes and/or developmental changes. And disposition is systemic change in acts and in groups.

The relationship of this sequence to situational differences and similarities and to motivational configurations is not clarified.

4th order: phases for stages of comprehensive continuity

These remarks pertaining to phases of operational, developmental, and systemic change in acts and groups are so simplistic as to be nothing more than suggestive of orientation to more thorough consideration of them.

Acts

For acts, operational changes embody phases of assertion which alternate with interim phases. A phase of assertion includes activating motivation, movement, resolution of a motivating tension, and modification of the situation in which the act takes place. An interim phase includes intervals of rest, of structuring motivation, of establishing orientation of ensuing assertion and of making preparations for that assertion. Developmental changes embody phases which pertain to rate and scope of action and to the complexity of the

structure of an act. For rates, phases of increase, steadiness, and decrease exist. Scope of action has phases of increase, constancy, and decrease. Phases for complexity are, also, those of increase, constancy, and decrease. Systemic changes for acts entail phases of questioning, conceptualization, construction, trial, modification, and abandonment, with operational changes of use and changed effectiveness often intervening between modification and abandonment.

Groups

For groups, operational changes pertaining to people's mobility among positions entail phases of acquiring, holding, and relinquishing a position; phases pertaining to coordination among members of a group entail increased contact, involvement, synchronization, dissynchrony, reduced involvement, and reduced contact. Developmental change entails phases of increased, decreased, or constant prevalence as well as those of "vertical," "horizontal," or no change in location within a group. Systemic changes include intervals of questioning, conceptualization, organization, trial, modification, and disbanding, with operational changes of use and changed effectiveness often intervening between modification and disbanding. In general these phases are pertinent to the existence of a group, to the restructuring of a group, and to contact and affiliation between and among groups.

The phases have significance for effecting the transitions between stages of operational, developmental, and systemic change in comprehensive continuity. The point of transition between these stages of change is that at which a phase of change in a given situation modifies the "capacity" of the situation for sustaining and limiting that change. These changed situations are conditions from which can ensue modification of the salience of bases for motivation.

5th order: symbols which legitimize: bases for motivation

Regardless of how the basic six bases for motivation and the mediating contexts associated with them are complemented by imperative functions, stages in the comprehensive continuity, and phases of those stages, any combination of them in any given configuration can be enveloped by a system of symbols which legitimize behavior. These systems of symbols can vary from principles, ethics, and policies to expressions associated with advertising or "social causes;" they stand, by direct statement or implication, as explanations or rationalizations for activity. A close association between any such system of symbols and the basic six in their mediating contexts is postulated. Fifth order changes are shifts from one system of legitimizing symbols to another.

Shifts in the salience of bases for motivation

We lack hard evidence and observation with which to support generalizations about bases for motivation in configurations pertinent to given acts; nor do we have evidence to support generalizations about shifts in the salience of bases for motivation and/or of configurations of those bases. However, in a mechanistic way, one can aver insights. A shift in salience is regarded as embodying activation of a base for motivation to a degree which overrides that of all other activated bases. This can occur when completion of an act resolves a motivating tension and another motivational base becomes salient in synchrony with stimulation from within the person and/or from the situation in which the person acts. It can also occur when stimulation within a person and/or from the situation in which he acts occurs with adequate intensity to override the existing salient motivational base, to interrupt an ongoing act, and to prompt acts expressive of the newly salient motivational base.

Under the first condition, in which bio-physical rhythms and situation embody patterned and repeated movements which are synchronized, routine shifts in the salience of motivational bases occur along with routine activity. This is the condition which is a basis for people's mutually predictable behavior and for allowing them to regard their constantly changing relationships as "stable."

From the second condition ensues an interruption of routine and stability when the overriding stimulus is not part of a pattern of repeated movements to which people are oriented. Under circumstances in which movements are unpatterned and/or not repeated, the salience of motivational bases has no routine shifts, and people act in accord with the irregularity of movement in their physical beings and in the situations they encounter. Under these conditions, the change taking place is such that relationships are not regarded as "stable."

These mechanistically expressed insights fall short of providing the type of comprehension which is potential for understanding shifts in the salience of bases for motivation.

Social change and rural sociologists

The relevance of this conceptualization for rural sociologists is in their using it to take perspective both on their participation in social change while making contributions to the achievement of imperative functions and on change which they engender in others whom they influence. It is possible to illustrate types of change in the comprehensive continuity, for example, from the experiences which rural sociologists have as individuals and professionally. For operational changes in acts, they participate in an activity contributing to the achievement of imperative functions; traditional emphases are on teaching, research, and service in the context of land-grant

colleges, agricultural experiment stations, and cooperative extension services. Group operational changes are experienced in transitions through a continuity of associated positions as student and professional; these may be associated with geographic migration. Members' transitions between and among positions in the Rural Sociological Society, as well, are group operational changes. Developmental change in activity is associated with, for example, the extension rural sociologist's travel to places of scheduled commitment; the 1986 automobile and contemporary highways, when compared with those of 1926, are associated with a configuration of space, "style" of movement, time, and norms different from those prevalent in 1926. Developmental change in groups includes the increased prevalence of departments of rural sociology, the increased number of students acquiring advanced degrees, and the curtailment of funds currently confronting land-grant schools. Systemic change in action lies in the development of new research techniques and new techniques for communicating in the classroom and in service activities. For group systemic change, one notes the origin of a department of rural sociology, the origin of the Rural Sociological Society, establishment of its affiliation with the American Sociological Association, and the origin of the International Rural Sociological Association; one may also note organization set up around special interests within the Rural Sociological Society. Clearly, rural sociologists have engaged in social change; their domain seems a fertile field for participant observation.

However, both the bell-wether and the <u>bete noire</u> of their operational activities is the tendency to focus concern on "problem" situations; the focus is not only on "problems" but on rural (however defined) problems, or on problems with which "rurality" is associated. This is not inappropriate, given the legal and traditional public financial support of land-grant schools and

injunctions pertaining to public concern and benefit. From these, "applied work" ensues. Yet, it is at this point that conceptualization and techniques are needed to extend the discipline's capabilities to serve a supporting public.

If the discipline needs must be concerned with "problem conditions" (situations), question can be raised first about how and from whose point of view the problem is defined. Then comes the question of how the problem conditions can be conceptualized as aspects of a holistic society (or of an ecological system) in which change is incessant; I suggest that the perspective on change roughly delineated above has relevance for an answer to this question. To be sure, the sketch provides but orientation and insights. However, regardless of how problem conditions may be viewed from varying positions within the structure of a society, "problem conditions" (and solutions to those problems), viewed as ongoing aspects of change in a society by social scientists, are conditions pertinent to valid generalizations about change. And to these generalizations the research, the classroom instruction, and the service activity of any rural sociologist, however minuscule or mammoth their significance in the eyes of their performer, have relevance.

To lapse back to the allusion to blind men, elephants, and identity, -- if rural sociologists need consensus of "focus and perspective" which would allow them to comprehend the whole of the elephant while in touch with only part of it and would provide them with a substantial basis for identity, a systematic and comprehensive conceptualization of social change could be useful. With it, the seemingly disparate activities of rural sociologists can be comprehended as related aspects of change within a systematic holistic structure (society; ecological system) and/or within structures in contact with each other (international work). Equally appropriate perspective can be taken on the

changes which ensue from their activities. In addition, rural sociologists might find in this conceptualization the acceptable and repetitiously perceived sameness of characteristics which E. Erikson (1968) indicates stand as bases for acceptable identity.

The idea is at least challenging.

*This communique reflects extensive revision of a paper presented by the author at the 1985 meeting of the Rural Sociological Society, in Blacksburg, Virginia, and entitled "Social Change and Resolution of the Pure/Applied Dilemma."

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